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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [US](#) [RU](#) [CH](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PM BARAK DISCUSSES REGIONAL CHALLENGES WITH
CODEL MCCAIN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gene A. Cretz. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Senators John McCain (AZ), Joe Lieberman (CT), Susan Collins (ME) and John Thune (SD), as well as Representative Mark Kirk (IL) met with former Prime Minister Ehud Barak on December 17 to discuss developments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. Barak criticized the "Pavlovian" response of the current Israeli government to the challenge posed by Hizballah, and offered ideas for how the U.S. might respond to the strategic challenge posed by Iran. He recommended paying "painful prices" to enlist the support of Russia and China against Iran and the broader challenge of international terrorism. End Summary.

Iraq

¶2. (C) Senator McCain briefed Barak on the Codel's recent trip to Iraq and Afghanistan and his assessment that things are not going well. "If the situation in Iraq does not change in three to six months, the American people will demand a withdrawal," McCain assessed. Barak, who recalled that he had been a supporter of the war, responded that if America fails in Iraq, it will ripple beyond the Middle East. Barak offered that "rebalancing the (Iraqi) constitution" followed by reconfiguring U.S. forces as a rapid deployment force concentrated in the Western Desert would be how he would proceed in Iraq. He said he would be worried about leaving hundreds of U.S. forces intermingled as advisers among Iraqi forces.

Iran

¶3. (C) Barak noted that a number of Sunni Arabs had confided to him that they see Israel as the only strategic counterweight to Iran in the region. Commenting on the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group's report, Barak agreed that while it might be worthwhile to discuss technical matters pertaining to border control with Iran and Syria or to maintain a channel of communication with them, he disagreed that dialogue with Iran and Syria constituted a strategy. "If you negotiate with them, you will negotiate the terms of defeat," Barak concluded.

¶4. (C) Senator McCain asked what Barak would do if Iran

could not be prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons. Barak said this situation would end the nonproliferation regime and lead to a nuclear arms race in the region. "Some states will develop one, or buy these weapons. In ten years, terrorists will have devices that they can plant in containers destined for Israel, Europe or the U.S." Barak discussed the importance of diplomacy, sanctions and port security, but acknowledged that these tools "probably won't suffice" to counter the Iranian nuclear threat. Creating an effective system of deterrence would be much more delicate, in Barak's view: "Iran and the DPRK must know in advance what will happen if they pursue this option."

15. (C) Representative Kirk noted Iran's dependence on refined gasoline and asked whether a "quarantine of the willing" might constrain Iran. Barak affirmed the importance of European, Russian, Chinese and Indian support. He mused that the attempt to form this coalition might prompt the Iranians to close the Straits of Hormuz, an action that would actually serve to galvanize such a coalition. In response to a question, Barak did not think that Israeli military training operations in the Indian Ocean would be a good move.

Afghanistan

16. (C) Senator McCain described the military situation in Afghanistan and along its borders with Pakistan. The Senator shared his concern that there are insufficient numbers of coalition troops in Afghanistan, and that the self-imposed restrictions of several contributors regarding action their forces could take rendered their contribution "almost worthless." Barak feared the possibility that nuclear

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weapons could get into the hands of extremists in Pakistan. Senator McCain affirmed that the animosity between Karzai and Musharraf was very problematic, as was the Pakistani president's agreement to a safehaven in Waziristan, which would negatively affect coalition action against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Importance of Russia/China

17. (C) To win the war on terror and proliferation of nuclear weapons to rogue states, Barak assessed that a paradigm shift would be required in order to secure meaningful sanctions. Barak opined that Russia and China are aware of the risks of nuclear proliferation, but both countries share a strategic interest in seeing the U.S. humbled in what they perceive as efforts to "go it alone." "The U.S. needs Russia, China and India as partners and may have to pay a painful price for their support," Barak continued. To achieve sufficient "intimacy" with Russia, the U.S. would have to curtail its criticism of Russian policy toward Chechnya. Regarding China, Barak added that "Taiwan was not worth the price of defeating world terror." He also believed that the U.S. might have to forego severely pressuring China on economic concessions as well.

Palestinian Authority

18. (C) Senator McCain mentioned that President Abbas had indicated that he sought funding quickly and that the Iranians are providing significant funds to Hamas. McCain indicated that if the GOI supported such a request, that would be important to know. Barak commented that President Abbas had "woken up very late" to the challenge posed by Hamas, a movement that is perceived as genuine -- and less corrupt than Fatah -- within Palestinian society. He thought it important that no Israeli fingerprints appear on any

assistance to Abbas; overt Israeli backing would work against Abbas. Senator Collins asked if there was any way to direct withheld tax revenue to Abbas, but not to Hamas. Barak confided that he did not know the legal issues that might be involved.

¶9. (C) Senator Thune asked Barak if he saw a way for the peace process to get back on track. Barak responded that despite current disillusionment, the Israeli body politic "from the middle of Meretz to the middle of the Likud parties" now supported a two-state solution. The Palestinian side, in Barak's view, "does not want peace." Even Abbas, Barak recollected with obvious bitterness, found a way to duck out of the 2000 Camp David negotiations "at the critical moment."

Lebanon

¶10. (C) Responding to questions about the Hizballah threat posed by Senator Lieberman and Senator McCain, Barak explained that the recent Lebanon War results fell short of Israeli expectations because the GOI had reacted to Hizballah provocation without thinking through its strategy or planning for going to war: "Just because (a military response) is justifiable and legitimate does not mean it is clever!" He refrained from offering an operational critique of the war, but recalled that his government used to retaliate against Hizballah and the "puppet government" and claimed that this strategy had been effective and remained relevant. Barak said he was not concerned about the IDF's ability to turn itself around, but he was concerned that the perceptions of Israel's neighbors would not shift, especially Syria. All the same, Barak said he was not worried about the possibility that Hizballah could overthrow the current Lebanese government: "Lebanon is not as critical as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan."

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